Design Competition

Pioneer Courthouse Square Design Committee

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THE PIONEER COURTHOUSE SQUARE DESIGN COMPETITION
A public square for downtown Portland

The parking lot opposite the Pioneer Courthouse occupies the most significant square block in the city of Portland. Throughout our history it has served many functions. It was the site of Portland’s first real school house. Later, the base for the grand old Portland Hotel. And when the automobile replaced the feet that had strolled the downtown boulevards, it became the city’s central parking lot. Today, happily, the romance of downtown flourishes once again. The sidewalks are filled with flower carts and food vendors and Portland’s central block is about to be converted to yet another use—it will become our main public plaza—dedicated to people.

The design selection process

Five solid years of intensive public discussion and the involvement of a Council appointed Citizens’ Advisory Committee, led to a recommendation in 1979 that the design of Pioneer Courthouse Square be opened to competition.

The specific competition approach was developed by the Citizens’ Advisory Committee in cooperation with representatives of local architectural, landscape architectural and planning organizations and the Metropolitan Arts Commission, and involved more than 150 meetings with community groups and city agencies under the direction of the Portland Development Commission.

With the City Council’s appointment of the Jury of Award, a request for proposals was advertised throughout the U.S. and Canada. From 750 responses, 162 submissions were received. In March, the Jury interviewed 10 of these firms and selected the five finalists. Selections were based on the design capabilities of the individuals to be involved, a statement of design approach, and overall presentation.

Designs from the five finalist teams are based on the program approved by City Council, and their April in-town briefing by the Jury, Professional Advisor and City agencies. The program generally required an elegant and inviting central attraction for the downtown, providing year-round day and evening public use.

After submission of the design concepts in July, the Jury’s final recommendation is to be presented to the Development Commission and forwarded to City Council for final approval.

The Jurors

Pauline S. Anderson has been active in a number of community activities. She is a representative of the Pioneer Square Citizen’s Advisory Committee; Chairman of the Board of Portland Youth Advocates; on the Board of Portland Governors of the Portland City

Community looking over the 162 original submissions.
Club; and board member of Schools for the City. She has been appointed to the Governor’s Commission of Youth, The White House Conference on Families, and the Metropolitan Youth Commission.

Landscape architect/urban designer M. Paul Friedberg FASLA, was recently awarded the 1980 AIA medal in recognition of “an individual who has inspired and influenced the architectural profession.”

Best known for his design of urban parks and playgrounds, Friedberg is a partner in M. Paul Friedberg & Partners, New York City. His projects include New York City’s Riis Plaza and Amphitheater, Niagara Falls Rainbow Center and Winter Garden, Minneapolis’ Peavy Plaza, and the rehabilitation of Pershing & Sherman Parks on Washington, D.C.’s Pennsylvania Avenue—now in progress.

Recipient of many awards, Friedberg is a Trustee of the American Academy in Rome, Vice President of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Vice President of the Architectural League, and a member of Cornell University’s advisory board for the School of Architecture.

George A. McMath AIA, is a partner in Allen, McMath, Hawkins Architects in Portland. He has played a very active role in historical preservation, serving on both the Portland Historical and Oregon Landmarks Commissions, and as member and chairman of the State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation. He is currently Chairman of the Historic American Building Survey Advisory Board of the National Park Service and Director of the Historic Preservation League of Oregon, and Historical Consultant to the downtown plan.

His firm has done a number of major restoration projects in Portland, including the Pioneer Courthouse and the Barber Block.

John L. Rian, Portland restaurateur, is on the Board of Directors for the Association for Portland Progress, Artoquate, Boys’ Club of Portland, and The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. He is also Director of the National Restaurant Association.

Sumner M. Sharpe AICP, is Senior Associate with Cogan & Associates in Portland. His consulting work has included a wide variety of projects on the West Coast in the areas of neighborhood planning, public housing site selection, energy facility siting, community development and growth management.

In addition to his consultation practice, Dr. Sharpe is also a member of the faculty at Portland State University in the Urban Studies Center. He participated in the development of the design program representing the American Institute of Planners.

Donald J. Stastny AIA, AICP, was project manager responsible for preparation of the design program, designer selection process and project budget, under contract to the City of Portland. He was appointed by City Council as Professional Advisor for the competition. He has participated in numerous urban design, planning and architectural projects ranging from individual buildings to new towns with architectural/planning firms and public agencies in Philadelphia, New York, Washington, D.C., Buffalo, Seattle and Portland. His international experience includes work in Athens, Greece; Edmonton, Alberta; and Khartoum, Sudan.

The community’s role

After the decision on the design concept is made by City Council, a joint city and community fund raising effort will begin to finance the full $3 million still needed for construction. Private funding support has been a key part of the feasibility of this overall $7.5 million project, beginning with Meier & Frank’s early pledge of $500,000. It is expected that the excitement and quality of the design and community support for building the square will generate contributions in all sizes from a broad base of local businesses and citizens.

For further information contact:
Portland Development Commission
1500 S.W. First Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97201
(503) 248-4800
Eisenman/Robertson, Architects

This firm, with offices in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Princeton, New Jersey, was honored with the AIA 1979 Firm Award.

Robert Geddes FAIA, is Dean of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at Princeton University. He has extensive experience in planning and design for education institutions, public agencies, and corporate groups.

Michael A. Kohn AIA, is an instructor in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a registered architect, and member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Construction Specifications Institute and of the American Institute of Architects, where he chaired the Professional Examination Review Committee.

Edward R. Ford has served as Adjunct Professor at the University of Kansas and presently holds the position of Adjunct Assistant Professor in Design at Temple University.

Geddes, Brechee Qualia, Cunningham, Architects

This firm, with offices in San Francisco, has won many prizes in national and international competitions, and has been exhibited in many museums and galleries, including the Museum of Modern Art.
THE PROPOSED DESIGNS FOR PIONEER COURTHOUSE SQUARE

This design is both a garden and an urban plaza. At its core, it is a dialogue between nature and man—what existed and what was imposed. It suggests simple and complex relations between the natural and the manmade, between nature and man's art. The two blocks which contain the Courthouse and the new Square are brought together in the design to create a "double square." The old Courthouse is left intact with the new Square responding to it.

In order to accommodate its many changing uses and to acknowledge its special character with respect to the Courthouse, the new Square has the following features:

- Two pavilions. One is a gigantic conservatory flower room, the other a terraced cafe.
- A space for a museum and orientation center below the pavilions which utilizes the vaults under the sidewalk.
- An elegant paved ground of brick and stone, which creates the sense of unified space and reduces the visual intrusion of the rights-of-way for light rail, bus and vehicles.
- An inner garden. This includes stepped terraces with trees, flowers, formal and informal seating and provides a natural amphitheater for concerts, plays and performances. It is connected to a shaded grove of evergreens by a watercourse.
- Open paved areas to accommodate pedestrian movements and the loading and unloading of light rail.
- A series of permanent shelters for transit passengers.
- Ancillary equipment including tents, awnings, a demountable stage and shell, to provide for flexible use and easy storage.

This design incorporates a place of assembly in the form of an urban theater and a place of retreat in the form of a covered garden and conservatory, which will contain plantings native to the area. Elements of the design include:

- An area which will be lit to become the most prominent element of the scheme at night. Included here are the covered garden, trellis and glass wall of the conservatory. Located nearby would be stands for permanent vendors which could also be open at night.
- Smaller spaces surrounding the major square which consist of a variety of forms for shelter and enclosure to provide varying degrees of protection from sun, rain, wind and cold, and thus encourage use of the square throughout the year. Included in this area are the completely enclosed and conditioned conservatory, a covered garden, a glass covered arcade, a canvas covered arcade with removable awnings, a pergola covered terrace and completely covered seating areas.
- Landscaping of the square has been designed to reflect the same type of plantings which surround the Pioneer Courthouse.

The Controlling Concept

The Square will be the central feature of the downtown and as such should be distinctive, dynamic, elegant, inviting, and unique to the area. The total Square and its environs should be oriented around a single, predominant concept which will serve as a strong, positive attractor to the downtown.

Functional Requirements

The Square should be a day and evening, all season, all weather, people-oriented space. It should provide for features and functional areas to attract the general public to the downtown, and to meet the cultural, open space, shelter, and recreational needs of the general public.

Excerpts from "The Design Program" as adopted by City Council.
This design provides a focal town center which is accomplished through the use of three-dimensional symbols. Elements include:

- A water garden which is a true garden. The water originates in a grotto under the stage, flows into a series of pools at different levels and cascades down steps.
- An arcade, which serves as a light rail shelter, expands to form a theatre proscenium, a tower, and glass pavilion. Wooden trellises will be covered by a profusion of roses.
- Several stages and performing areas. With the water off, the water garden becomes a central stage with seating all around. And the roofed base of the tower also opens as a stage for smaller, more intimate events.

The clock tower which overlooks the paved spaces of the square which are kept open and uncluttered for multiple uses.

- A great, glowing structure at the north end which is designed like a huge glass tent. Its multi-use interior is a wintergarden of native and exotic flowers and foliage, and includes a variety of spaces for cafes, restaurants and an information center.

This submission is described by the designers as “what could be the first materialization of a building type that can be seen as today’s equivalent of the ‘cathedral-city hall-market place’ of the medieval city.” Its principal elements include:

- The square, which is open enough to serve as a stage in itself, or as the seating area from which to view another possible stage formed by the grand landing of the passage from Broadway to the square.

- The greenhouse, which will serve as an open glass “palace,” with multiple doors which will invite passersby to stroll among the exotic plants. At another level it will house a restaurant and tea room and shops, all with views of the square.

- A variety of smaller pieces including a fountain gazebo, with benches and a pergola laced with roses and wisteria, a covered shelter which will serve as a general information booth, a gazebo, rose gardens, and a promenade bordered with rows of planters.

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Features include the following:

- A podium-like “keystone” to serve as a place for public addresses, as well as the official station for “The Lord Mayor of the Square,” a colorfully uniformed functionary to greet visitors and keep an eye on things.

- 12 monumental columns running along the south side which relate to the major buildings surrounding the square.

- All-weather, colored awnings to provide protection for light-rail passengers. These extend into a low-walled, open-air market.

- A podium-like “keystone” to serve as a place for public addresses, as well as the official station for “The Lord Mayor of the Square.”

Two small tinted glass pavilions, latticed in bronze and crowned with arches of climbing roses, as well as an information center, tea and coffee stations, a pergola moated in glass to match the pavilions and crowned with more rose arbors. Watert runs in channels along the tops of low brick walls in this area.

- Small amphitheater which will serve as a canopy covered orchestra or bandstand, or be used as the seating area for small musical or stage performances.

- The wrought iron gate from the old Portland Hotel, which will be placed exactly as it once stood, facing the Pioneer Courthouse.

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- Other features would include programmable laser light shows, and a weather machine, consisting of three-dimensional symbols mounted high in the square for visibility.

This entry is purposely designed to liberate the square from its constraining 200 foot property lines and give those who are walking or driving a sense of being “in” the square.